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SUBJECT: WIND ENERGY ON THE RISE IN RODRIGUES

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¶1. SUMMARY. The Central Electricity Board (CEB), the government agency responsible for the production, transmission and distribution of electricity in the islands of Mauritius and Rodrigues, announced that Vergnet (France) will set up two wind turbines on Rodrigues Island to increase wind-produced electricity. The project, fully funded by CEB, is a major step toward improving electricity production and supply in Rodrigues and will contribute to the island's sustainable development by reducing its dependency on fossil fuels and is one initiative started under the Maurice Ile Durable (Resilient Mauritius) project launched by the Prime Minister's office this month. The Maurice Ile Durable project was initiated after the Mauritian Public Utilities Minister attended the Washington International Renewable Energy Conference (WIREC) and presents opportunities for U.S. investment. END SUMMARY.

¶2. Rodrigues, a 40 square mile island 344 miles east of Mauritius with a population of 37,000, is an autonomous region and dependency of Mauritius. Electrical power is provided by CEB, who has an office and fossil fuel-based electrical plant on the island. CEB's tariffs are the same as on mainland Mauritius, although at a higher production cost. By increased production of alternative energy, fossil fuel dependence (and cost) can be reduced. This is a major aim of the Maurice Ile Durable (Resilient Mauritius) project, a large-scale initiative aimed at reducing the country's dependence on fossil fuels in a wider context of sustainable development, which was launched by the current Ramgoolam government this month. The new wind turbines in Rodrigues are part of this initiative.

¶3. The Maurice Ile Durable project was championed in this year's budget, which allocated Rs 1.3 billion (\$48 million) to the fund to support measures to increase reliance on renewable energy, protect the environment through recycling, and encourage more efficient use of energy. The exact target of this project-- to meet 30 percent of Mauritius' energy needs through use of renewable resources by 2015-- was a target set and initiated by Public Utilities Minister Abu Kasenally after his visit to the Washington International Renewable Energy Conference in March 2008.

¶4. The Maurice Ile Durable project comprises several initiatives, of which, two present opportunities for U.S. based companies. The committee running the Land Based Oceanic Industry project, a project that envisions using cold seawater for air conditioning and water bottling, is already in talks with General Electric to supply equipment. Likewise, the waste energy component of the Maurice Ile Durable project is a partnership between a local company and U.S. company Covanta Energy.

15. Vergnet, who will set up two new 275 kilowatt wind turbines, was awarded the contract after a successful pilot program in 2003 which resulted in three smaller turbines that are currently in operation. The two new wind turbines come at a cost of Rs 40 million (USD 1.4 million), paid for by CEB. These turbines, expected to produce 1.66 gigawatt hours (GWh) annually (the three existing windmills produce 0.42 GWh), will bring Rodrigues' electrical generation by wind to 7% of the total.

16. A CEB official stated that the wind regime in Rodrigues is conducive to the implementation of projects such as these, and that they see this project as a major step forward in curbing their use of fossil fuels. He also said it would contribute to the island's (Rodrigues) sustainable development. This project could be a precursor for further development on the main island of Mauritius, as well. Pilot projects carried out in Mauritius in the 1980s were not successful as the wind turbines were damaged by cyclones. However, in light of the successful implementation of such projects in Rodrigues and the considerable progress in the design of turbines, the government is planning to set up a 25-40 MW wind farm in Mauritius with a view to optimizing the use of renewable energy.

BLASER